

# Wahgi language

**Wahgi** is a Trans–New Guinea language of the Chimbu–Wahgi branch spoken by approximately 100,000 people in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. Like other Chimbu languages, Wahgi has some unusual lateral consonants.

<b>Contents</b>
<b>Phonology</b>
Consonants
Vowels
Tone and stress
Phonotactics
<b>Evolution</b>
<b>Semantics</b>
Colors
Time
<b>Dictionary</b>
<b>References</b>
<b>External links</b>

## Phonology

### Consonants

Wahgi consonants <sup>[4]</sup>						
		<u>Bilabial</u>	<b>(palatalized)</b> <u>dental</u> <sup>[5]</sup>	<u>Alveolar</u>	<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>
<u>Nasal</u>		m	ɱ~ɱ <sup>j</sup>	n		ŋ
<u>Obstruent</u>	<u>oral</u>	p	ɸ~ɸ	t		k
	<u>prenasalised</u>	mb	ɱɸ~ɱɸ	nd		ŋg
<u>Lateral</u>			ɬ~ɬ <sup>j</sup>	ɭ		ɮ
<u>Semivowel</u>		w			j	

Wahgi	
Native to	Papua New Guinea
Region	Western Highlands Province
Native speakers	86,000 (1999) <sup>[1]</sup>
Language family	Trans–New Guinea <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Chimbu–Wahgi<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Wahgi languages<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Wahgi</b></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	Either: <div>wgi – Mid-Wahgi</div> whg – North Wahgi
Glottolog	nuc11620 ( <span>http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/nuc11620</span> ) <div>Nuclear Wahgi<sup>[2]</sup></div> nort2921 ( <span>http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/nort2921</span> ) <div>North Wahgi<sup>[3]</sup></div>

The dental consonants are "distributed", with closure along a considerable distance of the vocal tract. This presumably means that they are laminal, and that the alveolar consonants are apical. The dental consonants have palatalized allophones in free variation.

The description of the (palatalized) dentals suggest they may be alveolo-palatal or something similar. This is further suggested by transitional vowels triggered by /ʃ/, apparently even by its non-palatalized allophone: /oʃ/ [oɪʃ] 'moon', /'éʃé/ [ 'éʃɪɛ̀] [sic] 'here'.

The nasal element of the prenasalized consonants is syllabic when not preceded by a vowel, but takes a noncontrastive low tone and is never stressed: /'mbà/ [ṁ'ba] 'but', /'pɪ̃ɪ̯mbé/ ['pɪ̃ɪ̯ṁbé] 'we know'. Prenasalized consonants are perceived as single segments word-initially, but as nasal + stop word-medially.<sup>[6]</sup>

Nasals and semivowels have no notable allophony, apart from the optional palatalization of /ɲ/. The other consonants vary markedly, with most variants being positional:

### Consonantal allophones<sup>[4]</sup>

	word-initial	word-medial	word-final	word-initial, phrase-medial	word-final, phrase-medial
/p/	p~b p <sup>w</sup> ~b <sup>w</sup> [7]	p~b	p <sup>h</sup> ~ϕ		p <sup>h</sup> ~ϕ~p <sup>a</sup> [8]
/mb/	<sup>m</sup> p~ <sup>m</sup> b	mp~mb	mp <sup>h</sup> ~mϕ		mp <sup>h</sup> ~mϕ~mp <sup>a</sup> [8]
/s/	t̥~ṭs~s~ṭɬ~ɬ s <sup>w</sup> [7]	ṭs~s~ṭɬ~ɬ ṭ[9]	ṭs~s~ṭɬ~ɬ		[10]
/nz/	n̩d~n̩dz~n̩dz~n̩ṭ~n̩ṭs~n̩ṭɬ	n̩d~n̩dz~n̩dz~n̩ṭ~n̩ṭs~n̩ṭɬ	n̩ṭ~n̩ṭs~n̩ṭɬ~n̩s~n̩ɬ		
/t/	t~d t <sup>w</sup> [7]	r~r	ṛ	t~d <sup>[11]</sup> r~r <sup>[12]</sup>	r~r~ṛ ṛ <sup>2</sup> [13]
/nd/	n̩t~n̩d	nt~nd	nt <sup>h</sup>		nt <sup>h</sup> ~nt <sup>a</sup>
/k/	k~g k <sup>w</sup> ~g <sup>w</sup> [14]	k~g ŋ(?) <sup>[15]</sup>	k <sup>h</sup>		
/ng/	ŋk~ŋg ŋg <sup>w</sup> [7]	ŋk~ŋg	(does not occur)		
ʔ	(do not occur)	ʔ̤~ʔ̥ <sup>[16]</sup> ~ʔ̥~ʔ̥	ʔ̤~ʔ̥~ʔ̥		
/l/		l̥~l̥~l̥t <sup>h</sup> ~l̥tṛ~l̥ṛ~l̥~l̥d	l̥~l̥~l̥t <sup>h</sup> ~l̥tṛ~l̥ṛ		
/L/		L~KL~L̥~Ǿ <sup>[17]</sup>	L~KL		

The southern Kuma dialect has these three laterals, though the alveolar is rather uncommon. (The northern Danga dialect has two laterals, dental fricative and alveolar flap.) The dental and velar laterals assimilate to [ɭ] or [ɭ̥] before dental and alveolar consonants; the alveolar only to [ɭ] before alveolar consonants. In locational forms with a suffix beginning with /t/, the /t/ is elided following the lateral, so that on the surface Wahgi distinguishes dental vs alveolar lateral fricatives and alveolar lateral fricatives vs flaps.

## Vowels

Wahgi vowels<sup>[4]</sup>

	Front	Back
Close	i	u
Mid	ɪ	ɔ
Open	e	ä

/a/ appears as [ä] in all positions except before /k/ and /p/, where it is [e]. In medial position it is in occasional free variation with [æ].

/ɔ/ appears as [ɔ] in all positions except before nasals, where it is [ɒ]. Word-finally it is in free variation with [o].

/u/ is reduced to labialization ([ʷ]) between /p t s k ng/ and stressed /i/ or /ɪ/.

All vowels neutralize to [ɪ] in final unstressed closed syllables (disregarding subsequent "clitics").

In rapid speech, unstressed /u, ɪ, e/ elide between stressed syllables. For example, in rapid speech /'petep'ka/ is pronounced [ 'peɾp'ka].

## Tone and stress

Wahgi appears to have three word tones rather than phonemic tone on each syllable. At least one syllable will have a phonetic high tone, with the resulting patterns of high, rising and falling on words of one or two syllables, and peaking, rising and falling on words of three to five syllables. Stress also appears to be contrastive, but analysis is difficult.

On both monosyllabic and disyllabic words, the three tones are realized as high, rising and falling: [HH], [LH] and [HL]. An analysis of two phonemic syllable tones, HIGH and LOW, is complicated by the appearance of all three word tones on monosyllables with final occlusive codas (and phonetically short vowels).<sup>[18]</sup>

In polysyllabic words,

- HIGH (H) is phonetically high, optionally extra high on stressed syllables.
- LOW (L) is phonetically falling on unstressed syllables at the end of a prosodic phrase. It is phonetically mid between a high tone and another low tone (i.e. the sequence /HLL/ is [HML] and /LLH/ is [LMH]). It is phonetically low elsewhere.

On trisyllables, the patterns LHL, HLL, and LLH are attested. On tetrasyllables are LLHL, LLLH, and LHHL (that is, LMHL, LLMH, LHHL). On pentasyllables, only two patterns have been found, LLHHH and LLHHL (that is, LMHHH and LMHHL).

Words with six to nine syllables are only attested with a single pattern, a peaking tone (LHL) on the first three syllables followed by a falling tone (LH) stretched out over the remaining syllables. For words of six syllables, this is realized as LHLHLL (phonetically LHLHML); for seven, LHLHLLL; for eight, LHLHHLLL; for nine LHLHHLLLL. In each case, the second syllable (the first high tone) is also stressed, and it is not clear if these are actually double-peaking tones or single peaking tones with preceding stress. Regardless, there does not appear to be any phonemic distinction.

## Phonotactics

The maximal syllable in Wahgi is CVCC; the minimal syllable is V, which may be any vowel but /ɪ/. Any consonant may occur in the onset except the three laterals. Any consonant may occur in the coda except the semivowels and /ng/. With a coda consonant cluster, the first consonant may only be /p, t, k, ɬ, ɭ/ (the two

common laterals) and the second may only be /m, s/.

A word may be anywhere from one to nine syllables long. A monosyllabic word may be any type of syllable but V and maybe CV. (Phonetic length and perhaps tone distribution suggests that words transcribed as CV monosyllables may actually be CVV with identical vowels.) Beside the syllable-onset and -coda restrictions, /i, ɪ/ may not occur word-initially and /ɪ/ may not occur word-finally.

Observed vowel clusters within words are /i.a, i.o, i.u; ɪ.i, ɪ.o; e.i, e.o, e.u; a.i, a.ɪ, a.e, a.a, a.u; o.i, o.o; u.i, u.ɪ, u.a, u.o, u.u/. In some cases (such as /ɪ.i/) these sequences reduce across morpheme boundaries, and stress seems to play a role in vowel reduction. It may be that some of the difficulties in analyzing stress may be a conflation of vowel sequences across syllables with sequences in single heavy (bimoraic CVV) syllables.

Observed consonant clusters within words are those allowed as syllable codas, /ps, pm, tm, ks, km, ɬs, ɬm, ɭm/, plus /p.p, p.t, p.nz; mb.p, mb.t, mb.m; t.p, t.mb, t.nd, t.ŋ, t.n, t.ŋ; nd.p, nd.m; k.p; s.p, s.mb, s.nd, s.k, s.nz, s.m, s.n; nz.p, nz.m; m.p, m.nz, m.m, m.ŋ; ŋ.p, ŋ.m; n.p, n.m, n.ŋ; ŋ.p, ŋ.mb, ŋ.s, ŋ.nz, ŋ.m, ŋ.n; ɬ.p, ɬ.mb, ɬ.t, ɬ.k, ɬ [sic], ɬ.w; l.mb, l.nd; ɭ.p, ɭ.mb, ɭ.t, ɭ.nz, ɭ.n, ɭ.ŋ, ɭ.w/.

In rapid speech, the following additional combinations are known: /ks.mp, ks.n, ks.m, ps.nd, lm.ŋ, tm.ŋ/.

## Evolution

---

Below are some reflexes of proto-Trans-New Guinea proposed by Pawley (2012), drawn from Ramsey (1975):<sup>[19][20]</sup>

<b>proto-Trans-New Guinea</b>	<b>Middle Wahgi</b>
*ma- 'NEG clitic'	ma 'no!'
*ma(n,k,l)[a] 'ground'	maɬ
*mangV 'compact round object'	mun 'fruit, nut, lump'
*mo(k,ŋ)Vm 'joint'	mokum, mokem 'knuckle, joint'
*mundun-mangV 'heart'	mund-mun
*mV 'taro'	mi
*mV(k,ŋ)V[C] + t(e,i)- 'vomit'	mek (si-) 'vomit', mek 'vomitus'
*am(a,i) 'mother'	ama
*amu 'breast'	am
*niman 'louse'	numan
*n(o,u)man 'mind, soul'	numan 'thought, mind, will'
*kumV- 'die'	kumb- '(of fire) die'
*mo(k,ŋ)Vm 'joint'	mokum, mokem, (angeɬ) mokem 'knuckle, joint'
*na- 'eat'	no-
*niman 'louse'	numan
*n(o,u)man 'mind, soul'	numan 'thought, mind, will'
*mundun 'internal organs'	(?) mundun mo- 'be pot-bellied'
*niman 'louse'	numan
*n(o,u)man 'mind, soul'	numan
*mundu[n]-mangV 'heart'	mund-mun
*ŋaŋ[a] 'baby'	ŋaŋ 'small male child'
*ambi 'man'	(?) amb 'woman', ambi- 'wife'
*imbi 'name'	embe(m)
*pu- 'go'	pu
*apa 'father'	apa- 'maternal uncle'
*mund-mangV 'heart'	mund-mung
*tVk- 'cut, cut off'	tuk- 'chop'
*mangV 'compact round object'	mungum 'kidney'
*mangV 'compact round object'	mun 'fruit, nut, lump'
*mundu[n]-mangV 'heart'	mund-mun
*kakV- 'carry on shoulder'	(?) kau- 'carry on head or shoulder'
*tVk- 'cut, cut off'	tuk- 'chop'
*muk 'blue'	muk
*mV(k,ŋ)V[C] + t(e,i)- 'vomit'	mek (si-), mek 'vomitus'
*ma(n,k,l)[a] 'ground'	maɬ 'ground, soil, world'
*nok 'water'	noɬ
*ŋaŋ[a] 'baby'	ŋaɬ 'small baby', ŋaŋa 'male child'
*-i(t,l) '2DL verbal suffix'	-iɬ

To support his proto-Trans-New Guinea reconstructions, Pawley (2012) also cites probable reflexes in the Apali, Kalam, Kâte, Selepet, Binandere, Katei, Kiwai, Telefol, and Asmat languages.

## Semantics

---

### Colors

Middle Wahgi distinguishes 14 color terms (from Evelyn Ramsey 1975):<sup>[20]</sup>

- kuru ‘white, shades of off-white’
- nganimb ‘black’
- jipiɬ to- ‘be bluish-black’
- numb ‘nearly black; a plant used for dyeing string a dark grey’
- muk ‘true blue’
- manngiɬ ‘blue-green’
- kolnga ‘green; new; alive; raw, not fully cooked’
- balu ‘light brown, rust-coloured’
- bang ‘brown, red, orange, pink’
- galngin ‘brown’
- jilni ‘yellowish brown’
- bulni ‘yellow; yellow dye from a plant’ (overlapping with gi ni- ‘be yellow, bright’ and gispe kerem ‘yellow, yellow-orange’)

Middle Wahgi has three types of contrasting color patterns.<sup>[20]</sup>

- pepe ‘striped’
- mon punduk pandil ni pa- ‘be spotted, speckled’
- ngingan ni sim ‘variegated colours, mottled’

### Time

Middle Wahgi has at least a dozen words for days before or after, going far beyond ‘yesterday’ or ‘tomorrow’ (from Evelyn Ramsey 1975):<sup>[20]</sup>

- pi, opi ‘today’
- toɬpa ‘tomorrow’
- taɬ ‘day after tomorrow’
- tolŋe ‘yesterday’
- tolŋe taɬ ‘day before yesterday’
- toi ‘4th day, i. e. 3 days from today’
- amb tupuɬɬ ‘5th day from today’
- yi tupuɬ ‘6th day from today’
- kinwaɬ ‘7th day from today’
- manwaɬ ‘8th day from today’
- moɬwaɬ ‘9th day from today’
- kialwaɬ ‘10th day from today’

# Dictionary

---

The first dictionary of Middle Wahgi was published by Church of the Nazarene medical missionary Evelyn Ramsey in 1975.<sup>[21][22]</sup>

## References

---

- Phillips, Donald (1976) *Wahgi phonology and morphology*. Pacific linguistics B, issue 36
- 1. Mid-Wahgi (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/wgi/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
- North Wahgi (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/whg/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
- 2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Wahgi" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/nucl1620>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
- 3. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "North Wahgi" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/nort2921>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
- 4. Phillips 1976
- 5. Presumed readings of palatalized allophones ⟨tʃ ʃ ɲ⟩ etc.
- 6. Phillips 1976: 54
- 7. Realized as labial before a vowel sequence /u ' i/ or /u ' ɪ/ (with stress on the /i/ or /ɪ/): /pu ' i/ = [ ' pʷi~ ' bʷi], /su ' i/ = [ ' sʷi], etc.
- 8. [(m)pʰ] an option before an obstruent
- 9. [tʃ] only appears word-medially as the second member of a consonant cluster
- 10. Final [ɣ] appears before a following [r, r]
- 11. Following alveolars, velars, nasals (except /nz/) and laterals
- 12. Following vowels, bilabials and sibilants (including /nz/)
- 13. before [n]
- 14. /k/ is labialized not just before /ui/ and /uɪ/, but before /o/ when that /o/ is followed by /n/ or /ŋ/ (unless the nasal is then followed by /e/), or by /nd/ or /nz/ regardless of the next vowel, as in /kon/ 'bag' and /konze/ 'ball' but not /kone/ 'place'.
- 15. The text says "/k/ occurs in free variation with /ŋ/ following word-initial vowel." It is unclear what this is supposed to mean. The illustrative examples show [k~g] in / ' pākám/ [ ' pākám, ' pākám] 'forked branch' but only [ŋ] in / ' mòkínè/ [ ' mòŋínè] 'food', neither of which match the wording for free variation with /ŋ/.
- 16. a "voiceless dental fricative lateral with voiceless **grooved** dental fricative release"
- 17. A **velar lateral flap** [ɭ] occurs in Kanite and Melpa, so perhaps the flap here is also lateral.
- 18. Monosyllables with falling tone are transcribed with low tone in Phillips 1976.
- 19. **Pawley, Andrew** (2012). Hammarström, Harald; van den Heuvel, Wilco (eds.). "How reconstructable is proto Trans New Guinea? Problems, progress, prospects". *History, Contact and Classification of Papuan Languages*. Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea: Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea (Language & Linguistics in Melanesia Special Issue 2012: Part I): 88–164. hdl:1885/38602 (<https://hdl.handle.net/1885%2F38602>). ISSN 0023-1959 (<https://www.worldcat.org/issn/0023-1959>).
- 20. Ramsey, Evelyn. 1975. *Middle-Wahgi Dictionary*. Mt Hagen |+ Church of the Nazarene.
- 21. Reay, Marie (1 March 1977). "REVIEWS". *Oceania*. **47** (3): 245–246. doi:10.1002/j.1834-4461.1977.tb01291.x (<https://doi.org/10.1002%2Fj.1834-4461.1977.tb01291.x>).
- 22. Gerald H. Anderson (1999). *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=oQ8BFk9K0ToC&pg=PA596>). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing. pp. 557–. ISBN 978-0-8028-4680-8.

## External links

---

- [Organised Phonology Data \(http://www-01.sil.org/pacific/png/pubs/0000357/Wahgi.pdf\)](http://www-01.sil.org/pacific/png/pubs/0000357/Wahgi.pdf)
  - [Wahgi orthography, phonology, word list and sample passage \(http://www-01.sil.org/pacific/png/pubs/928474523814/4\\_Yu\\_We.pdf\)](http://www-01.sil.org/pacific/png/pubs/928474523814/4_Yu_We.pdf)
  - [Paradisec has a number of collections that include Wahgi language materials \(http://catalog.paradisec.org.au/collections/search?language\\_code=wgi\)](http://catalog.paradisec.org.au/collections/search?language_code=wgi), including one from [Stephen A Wurm \(SAW3\)](http://catalog.paradisec.org.au/collections/SAW3) (<http://catalog.paradisec.org.au/collections/SAW3>).
- 

Retrieved from "[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wahgi\\_language&oldid=930489010](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wahgi_language&oldid=930489010)"

---

**This page was last edited on 12 December 2019, at 21:06 (UTC).**

Text is available under the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License](#); additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the [Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.](#), a non-profit organization.